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V

MEDICINE

1. RATIONAL AND MYSTICAL PROCEDURES

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THE term 'medicine' has been adopted mainly because it is simple and convenient without distorting too much the meaning of the Nupe word *cigbe*. The English equivalent, however, does not quite render the implications of the vernacular concept; for though the latter includes typical remedies, that is, materials applied for a strictly therapeutic purpose (as the Nupe see it), it equally includes materials whose alleged efficacy goes far beyond the treatment of ailments. In this latter sense *cigbe* is a substance or object which exercises remote and miraculous effects upon the efficacy of other objects, for example, tools or weapons, upon the outcome of human efforts of all kinds, and upon human fate in general. The correct though clumsy translation, then, would be 'efficacious substance' or 'force-in-substance' (as *kuti* meant 'force-in-ritual').

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Indeed, the important thing about *cigbe* is that it is always a substance, compounded of natural materials which anyone in possession of the recipe can collect and process by relatively simple procedures such as pulverizing, boiling, mixing, or charring. Most Nupe, incidentally, maintain that the essential ingredients of *cigbe* are always roots of trees.[1] It is tempting to conclude that here the empirical knowledge of the processes of plant growth has led to the assumption of some inherent but communicable force stored up in the roots of plants and trees. Which assumption would fit in well with the idea that all forms of illness connote a weakening of the life soul. But no one theorizes on these lines. Altogether, Nupe medicine shows little concern with theory, metaphysical or otherwise. As regards the alleged importance of roots, the various *cigbe* recipes show that herbs, grasses, the leaves of trees, or animal matter are employed as often. The power of *cigbe*, then, lies in materials of almost any sort if suitably processed and combined, and the knowledge of *cigbe* is precisely this skill of 'using ingredients'.[1]

[1] Two informants, in fact, assured me that the very word *cigbe* was a contraction of *cigbā gbere*, 'tree root'.

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We must now ask—to what extent is this knowledge empirically sound and the skill rationally employed? It can obviously not be entirely so since the non-therapeutic version of *cigbe*, credited as it is with remote effects upon objects or human actions, reveals at first sight already its non-empirical, miraculous nature. Yet the twofold use of medicine, therapeutic as well as non-therapeutic, suggests the corresponding distinction between rational practices and others irrational or 'magical'. To some extent this will prove a valid distinction, though one far less clear-cut or consistent; and this in turn is partly due to the ambiguity of the concept of rationality when it is applied to the practices of a primitive people. For they may act with rational intent but insufficient or faulty knowledge, so that their would-be empirical practices will conflict with our scientific knowledge, and hence strike us as irrational or 'magical'; while in a sense the converse case may equally occur.

I spoke of this before and need here only state the four possibilities entailed in these considerations. First, a procedure 'subjectively' rational, involving for the people the application of ordinary learned skills, may also be 'objectively' rational, that is, appropriate to the ends for which it is employed. Secondly, a subjectively rational procedure may prove futile and incongruous when assessed by 'objective' standards. Thirdly, a procedure professedly supernatural or mystical may yet prove appropriate, concealing some valid empirical principle. Lastly, a professedly mystical procedure may be such also from our point of view, that is, empirically false and incapable of achieving the ends for which it is employed.

Before examining each possibility in turn we must restate our criteria for assessing the mystical as against the professedly rational intent behind *cigbe* practice. In a very general sense, every *cigbe* procedure implies both kinds of intent. For even though Nupe medicine is, by definition, 'knowledge', which is usually purely technical as well as transferable through tuition or purchase, it is also given a mythical pedigree and related to the remoteness of God.[1] But these mystical associations are left almost entirely unemphasized, furnishing only a vague and ineffectual background, and can thus be disregarded. If, then, we are to credit certain procedures with mystical intent, they must exhibit it in a more pronounced and specific fashion. In the most obvious case the manufacture or application of *cigbe* will involve invocations of the deity and sacrifices proper, that is, open appeals for supernatural intervention. Where these are absent, we may yet search for that other evidence, of awe, fear, and a sense of the extraordinary or miraculous, which would set the procedure apart from pursuits

[1] See above, p. 18.

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and interests of a profane kind. The 'sense of the extraordinary' if it is not vouchsafed by verbal expressions, is clearly the most difficult to identify. But it is at least likely to go together with uncommon procedures and with rigid rules, barring even minute departures from a given course of action, that is, with ritualization. In sum I would list these criteria of professedly mystical as against professedly rational intent: the degree of ritualization implied in the preparation or application of medicines; their secrecy or otherwise; their commercial or non-commercial, public or private character; the diverse ways in which the knowledge of *cigbe* is transmitted; and the different kinds of faith placed in it.

If previously we described 'ritual' behaviour as behaviour exhibiting a degree of rigidity not accounted for by its professed aim, we may now say, of the 'ritualized' procedure of *cigbe*, that its rigidity is not accounted for by the rational intent. For the Nupe, the latter lies in the application of material substances which as such possess a given efficacy. But often we find additional and incongruous rules such as these: certain medicines may only be prepared in certain months of the year; in certain treatments a particular procedure must be repeated three times; in the operation of setting a broken limb four splints (no more and no less) must be used. Here, then, the Nupe no longer rely on the empirical or pseudo-empirical knowledge of 'ingredients'; rather, they abandon their own 'scientific' principles, diluting them with rules of a different order—with ritual, and hence with 'mystic' observances.

Again, certain medicines, their preparation and disposal, are cloaked in rigorous secrecy, while others are not secret or no more secret than the skills or tricks of a particular trade. The latter kind is usually freely bought and sold, while the secret medicines can be given away only with special formalities or not at all, being accessible only to the relatives or perhaps friends of the 'owner'; so that some medicines are available to the public, like any commercial commodity, and others are unalterably 'private'. As we know, the knowledge of *cigbe* is mostly transmitted through ordinary teaching, and is such as any clever, observant, or widely-travelled person can acquire; but occasionally it is hereditary, the ultimate provenance of the knowledge remaining unexplained. Finally, while no one would assume that ordinary remedies, administered without ceremonial, are infallible, precisely this faith is put in the other, 'miraculous', medicines, even if they involve no explicit appeals to the deity.

These features, however, occur with varying degrees of definiteness; and, though they all hang together logically, they do not always appear together in practice. But considered singly, they

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offer only ambiguous criteria. Ritualization, for example, especially when it is slight, may represent only an item of 'knowledge', empirically futile and 'superstitious', but for all that entirely profane. And secrecy may attach to medicines, not because they are sacred or credited with miraculous efficacy, but because they are morally reprehensible. Our assessment of 'mystical' and 'rational' intent will therefore sometimes be uncertain and admit of borderline cases. Even so, it enables us to examine *cigbè* practice in the terms of the four 'possibilities' mentioned before.

(i) It is clear that this possibility can apply only to the therapeutic medicines. But only very few even of these satisfy our two conditions of rational intent and objective appropriateness. For several of the therapeutic medicines require the accompaniment of invocations or sacrifices, or otherwise exhibit at least an admixture of mystical intent; and those which do not, often fail on the second count. It is clear, however, that in this relatively backward society we must not assess the appropriateness or otherwise of remedies by too exacting a standard. Thus, if they do not conflict in principle with our scientific ideas and are such that their efficacy might at least conceivably be of the alleged kind, their actual worthlessness may be ignored; at least, it does not make them 'mystical', but only shows them to be crude, inadequate, or ill-chosen. This would be true of such remedies as herbal potions used for intestinal troubles, of salves or powders rubbed into snake-bites, or of certain simple surgical treatments. Few of these betray any true medical lore; the surgical operations are rarely applied and have little merit; most potions or salves prove on chemical analysis to have no positive value, though I found none that was actually harmful and a few that had a slight medicinal property, such as the absorptive or laxative effect of charred vegetable matter. Even so, these practices are at least of the right kind or resemble the right kind of treatment, and will for this reason be included in our first category.

Many more treatments are without even this semblance of appropriateness, suggesting merely blundering attempts, unguided even by faulty knowledge. Lunacy, for example, is treated by means of inhalations; smallpox is prevented by burning herbs in the entrance hut; pregnancy, by the wearing of a 'magic' belt; and for rheumatic pains one has this abstruse cure: the patient stands inside a hut, pressing the aching part of his body against the wall; the doctor stands outside and holds the 'medicine' with his foot against the wall, opposite the place where, on the inside, the patient's body touches the wall; the doctor then slowly drags the medicine to the ground, thus 'drawing the pain from the body'. Though this treatment seems to imply some crude

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755 reasoning from analogy, it clearly belongs, with all the other treatments just mentioned, to our second category, of practices utterly
757 incongruous and not even conceivably capable of the alleged effects.
813 We must add, further, that a great many therapeutic remedies are ascribed so multifarious an efficacy that their 'rational' application to one kind of ailment is belied by the other, extravagant claims. The same substance will serve as an antidote for snake-bite, as a cure for headaches, and as a potion applied in ordeals; and a herbal concoction for intestinal troubles will also be used to cure rheumatic pains in the fantastic manner just described. Thus the borderline between rational and pseudo-rational treatments is once more blurred, and the province of the former narrowed further. And here we may note that in a sense the Nupe wish to keep it narrow. For the one version of medicine which comes nearest to satisfying our two conditions of rational intent and empirical (if crude) appropriateness, that practised by the barber-doctors, is also criticized for this very reason. The barber-doctors [759] are entirely profane practitioners, whose skill is a matter of cleverness and learning, involves no secrecy, and is at the disposal of all who can pay for their services. But their practice is largely restricted to the capital and the more sophisticated large villages, and little known or little thought of elsewhere. Indeed, the country people simply laugh when you suggest that the barbers have a knowledge of *cigbe*; 'barbers', I was always told, 'know no *cigbe*; all they can do is to cure headache'. Now some of my informants certainly knew that this was incorrect; furthermore, several village *cigbe* of the secret and mystical kind were also supposed to cope with headache. It was therefore not the efficacy of the remedies which the people held in ridicule but their purely profane character; and in denying that the barbers possessed any worthwhile knowledge of medicine, they really denied that their knowledge deserved the name of medicine. We note, then, a bias towards excluding from the genus *cigbe* those remedies which combine all the characteristics of a rational practice. The true *cigbe*, the people seem to feel, must at least in some respects bear the mark of the extraordinary or 'magical'. But this is no more than a bias since even in the villages where the art of the barber-doctors was so de-
[369] rided there exist purely profane, would-be rational remedies.[1] Their number, however, is strikingly small; so that in the peasant culture of Nupe, unlike the urban culture of the capital, the non-mystical or non-'magical' *cigbe* represents an exception from the rule.

[1] Also, this 'bias' is being obliterated by the modern usage of the word *cigbe* for all European drugs and medical appliances, in which the Nupe see nothing transcendental or magical, but the application of 'knowledge' proper.

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(ii) We have already mentioned the therapeutic medicines which fall in this category in virtue of their fantastic nature or of the extravagant claims made for them. We need only add that there are no non-therapeutic *cigbe*, that is, medicines at first sight already 'miraculous' and irrational, which are handled in a would-be rational manner; all also imply at least some expression of mystical intent.

(iii) Strictly speaking, this possibility of professedly mystical but unwittingly appropriate practices does not apply to Nupe medicine. Trance possession attributed to spirits, magic dances meant to cure mental disorders, and similar treatments which might conceal a psycho-therapeutic efficacy under the mystical trappings are altogether absent. But the combination of invocations and sacrifices with remedies which are 'of the right kind' constitutes a borderline case since the people would attribute the success of the remedy (such as it is) as much to supernatural intervention as to the inherent properties of the ingredients employed. In a sense even the most absurd therapeutic remedies have a share of such a concealed empirical efficacy. In calling them absurd and worthless we were considering only their intrinsic inappropriateness to the effects ascribed to them; we cannot deny that the patient's trust in the efficacy of the medicine or the repute of the doctor may well produce at least an apparent relief. Which means, further, that the practitioner's medical notions will repeatedly receive some empirical support, whose spuriousness he is unable to judge.

(iv) Our last category comprises all the non-therapeutic medicines and a considerable number of therapeutic ones. Their objective irrationality cannot be mistaken. When a potion is said to make a person invisible, a salve to secure invulnerability, a herbal concoction kept in the village to keep away smallpox, or a powder applied to a hoe to double the farm output, there can clearly be no question but that only a miracle could make these 'medicines' effective. Nor is the mystical intent any less certain, being visible in the prescribed invocations, sacrifices, forms of ritualism, and so forth. It is interesting to note that several of these practices are based upon the principle 'like causes like'; by itself, this spurious 'theory would not establish the mystical intent since for the people it represents only one more item of would-be scientific knowledge. The same principle, in fact, also underlies a few therapeutic and strictly profane cures. But it seems significant that it is employed on a large scale only in the fully irrational practices, that is, in situations where success is vouchsafed also by mystical procedures. In other words, false knowledge tends to go together with transcendental guarantees (though more sound knowledge does not necessarily discard them).

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Let me summarize. By our criteria of rational and mystical intent the whole range of non-therapeutic *cigbe* together with a good portion of the therapeutic ones would fall in the category of transcendental practices (religious or 'magical'); while only the rest of the cures proper, good, bad, and indifferent, would belong on the side of reason or near-reason. And since a great many of the cures in the former category are 'objectively' as futile or absurd as the non-therapeutic variety, it may be said that the Nupe tend to treat as 'magical' what is, by all standards, magical and to aim at miraculous effects by means openly designed for miracles.

2. PHARMACOPOEIA NUPEANA

It seems convenient to insert here a fuller description of Nupe medicines and medical (or pseudo-medical) treatments. Their therapeutic or non-therapeutic character will become clear from the description, as will also the share of 'irrational' or mystical observances. We must, however, anticipate the various classes of medicine experts and briefly state their respective specialities. First, we have the guild of barber doctors, who are all Mohammedans and whose craft is entirely therapeutic and would-be empirical; a few minor instances of 'ritualization' do not contradict the generally rational intent. Secondly, there is the corresponding and predominantly pagan order of *cigbeciži* or *bociži* ('medicine-men'), whose practice, both therapeutic and non-therapeutic, invariably betrays mystical intent. Thirdly, there are a few individual experts who belong to neither organization and may employ any kind of *cigbe*. Lastly, we shall meet with the owners of hereditary medicines, vested in the lineage or (in Nupe parlance) 'house'; these are both therapeutic and non-therapeutic, and always conspicuously mystical. In one isolated case a conspicuously 'mystical' medicine is owned by a whole community. Let me also recall that some medical practitioners are diviners at the same time, though there is no firmer link between the two professions.

These are some of the remedies known to the barber-doctors of Bida. Stomach trouble is treated by means of various potions: one consists of the infusion of a certain swamp plant; another, of the infusion of the charred bark of the oil-palm, sheanut tree or locust-bean tree, mixed with natron;[1] a third, of the pounded roots of a certain tree, mixed with powdered eggshell, dried in the sun and then taken with water. Light headache is cured by burning a certain common plant and making the patient inhale the fumes,

[1] The 'natron' is natural carbonate of soda from Lake Chad which is on sale in all Nupe markets.

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or by preparing a potion from bits of earth extracted from a termite mound. For severe headache one applies an ointment to the eyes, compounded of the dried kernels of a fruit tree, the bark from the roots of another, cloves, and powdered antimony. Sometimes headache is treated quasi-surgically, by a species of bleeding; the barber makes a number of fine incisions into the patient's forehead and then rubs a paste of dried locust-beans and natron into the cuts. The counter-irritation thus induced may well offer a temporary relief, though the bleeding itself is probably too slight to have any effect; the cure, however, has an odd conclusion, the patient's head being knocked gently three times against the wall.

Ulcers and wounds are treated with powdered bark or roots, used either dry or damp, and left on the wound for two to three days. Broken limbs are first massaged with a salve made of palm-oil and the dried and powdered leaves of a certain tree (another remedy including dirt from a hen house and charred earth from a termite mound), after which one applies a ligature of rope, using four sticks as splints. The ligature is removed after three days, but the massage with the ointment is continued. If the fracture does not heal, this treatment is followed up with a 'stronger' one, to wit, a massage with snake poison. For smallpox one gives a potion made of the pods of a certain vine growing in the bush. There is also a 'prophylactic' treatment, applied when an epidemic is threatening; it consists either in drinking an infusion of the bark of the locust-bean tree, boiled together with some grains of sorghum or millet, or in fumigating the house, at night, by burning certain herbs. Pounded hibiscus seeds, taken like snuff, are given to patients suffering from asthma. For fever accompanied by rigor (malaria?) one drinks the boiled juice of the pawpaw mixed with natron; a more 'magical' cure consists in inhalations of the fumes from three ingredients burned together in an old, broken pot (never a new one)—a powdered herb, the swamp plant mentioned before, and twigs taken from a vulture's nest. We shall meet again with this predilection for old pots when discussing the medicines of the *cigbeci* experts; the vulture plays a part also in another remedy of the barber-doctors, applied to sore eyes: they are bathed in ash-water mixed with a pulverized vulture's leg. Other herbal concoctions are used in the treatment of gonorrhœa (called *tswashi*), syphilis (called *tunjeri*), and sleeping sickness; these remedies are similar in that the first two are said to increase the typical secretion until 'the whole disease leaves the body', while the last brings on diarrhœa, the germs of the disease being passed with the stool. Lunacy of a non-violent nature may be treated by means of inhalations, repeated several times day and night, or by

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means of a potion. For the inhalation one uses leaf-tips of the oil-palm, hair of a she-goat, and the pulverized genitals of a he-goat, all burned together in a pot; the potion is made of the sap of a certain 'male' shrub (that is, the fruitless variety, called *darabagi*, 'male *dara*'), the charred bark of another, mixed with natron. The patient, having been treated in this fashion, is said to calm down and eventually to recover, though the cure can never be certain. For violent and dangerous attacks there is no agreed cure. The barber-doctors, in fact, do not treat this form of insanity at all, but other people sometimes know a treatment, though it is always said to be difficult and uncertain. Thus one informant suggested that the patients must be made to fast until they calm down; and another recommended flogging (a treatment apparently widely applied in Yoruba country).[1]

A final group of medicines bears on conception and virility. Dried cocoyam, the charred bark of the *savi* tree, and onions, pounded and taken in water, are said to constitute a powerful aphrodisiac. Fertility of women is ensured by a potion, drunk the morning before cohabitation, made of an infusion of leaves of the tamarind tree mixed with natron. Delivery is facilitated by rubbing the womb with three herbs after they have been soaked in water for a night. There are also two 'contraceptive' medicines, one having a temporary effect only, the other believed to cause permanent barrenness. The former consists of two powdered herbs, mixed with bits of grass from a termite mound, and taken with water; the latter, of the charred stalk and leaves of a young cassava plant, mixed with henna root and natron, boiled in water, and drunk. The knowledge, incidentally, of the permanent 'contraceptive' is claimed to be purely platonic; the Bida practitioner at least has no chance of applying it in practice, not because he is reluctant to do so or because the Bida women avoid these shameful practices, but because they would not risk their reputation by thus openly consulting a 'doctor' in the town. Instead, my informants assured me, they go to 'medicine-men' in the villages, where they are unknown and their secret will be safe. A secret in fact it is; and here we meet with a first, though fairly mild, instance of reprehensible medicines, employed for immoral ends.

This list is far from complete, omitting, especially, the many variants of the same kind of cure.[2] The barber-doctors do not believe in specifics in the strict sense of the word; rather, there are several treatments for each ailment, and different practitioners

[1] The informant in question came, in fact, from Shari, a village on the border of Nupe and Yoruba.

[2] I recorded altogether thirty-four remedies known to barber-doctors, which number is probably fairly exhaustive.

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will often know and apply different ones. Also, some specialize in potions or in poultices and lotions; others prefer treatment by means of inhalations, which the Nupe call *turare* (a Hausa word, meaning 'scent' or 'fumigation'). Certain more versatile experts know several remedies for the same illness, which they would try out one after the other. The position is summed up in this statement of a famous Bida 'doctor': 'Sometimes one medicine proves sufficient; but there is only one way of discovering the right one—to experiment and trust in God.' Certain barber-doctors, too, are specialists in particular diseases and are known as such. Thus only two men in Bida knew how to treat lunacy and only one Bida barber (whom I met in Ibadan, where he was staying at the time) knew how to treat sleeping sickness; similarly, there were specialists for venereal diseases, for eye complaints, and so forth. For certain ailments there are no treatments; their list includes blindness, idiocy, leprosy, elephantiasis, deafness, 'incurable syphilis', and, oddly enough, the common cold; my informants made it quite clear that the last was too trifling a complaint to deserve the attention of 'doctors'.

As we have seen, surgical treatments are almost entirely absent, and the use of splints in fractures is considered no more important than the application of some 'strong' salve or ointment. The barbers, in fact, herbalists at heart, deprecate the 'use of the knife' and emphatically deny its value. Said the head of the barbers' guild: 'The knife begets pain; how could it cure?' Though the same few herbs or plants appear in the majority of remedies, this does not mean that they alone have curative properties. On the contrary, it is considered that all plants contain some medicine, even if its nature or extraction are not known. It is considered equally certain that this medical knowledge, far from being static, is growing all the time, so that the barbers today possess medicines unknown even a short time ago. Once more, this is a question of experimenting 'with the help of God', and there are certain rough rules how to proceed. One tries first the bark of a plant or tree not hitherto used; if this proves worthless, one tries the roots, and finally the leaves or fruits. As to why certain parts of plants should contain *cigbe* and others not, there is no answer; or rather the usual answer is *'cigbe u de 'tsu a'*, 'medicines have no king' (that is, follow no proclaimed law): God has made them so, and men can only hope to learn by trial and error or by accepting the wisdom of others.

A strikingly large number of remedies employ plant parasites (called *etú*), and their special medicinal properties are strongly emphasized. If the alien growth of the parasites once suggested to the people some affinity with the nature of diseases and hence a

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possible application of the principle 'like cures like', no one today is aware of this notion. Nor are there any 'theories' as regards such abstruse ingredients as eggshells, the excreta of fowls, twigs from the nest of vultures, or grass from inside an ant-heap. Yet it is also difficult to see how the precept, 'experiment with the help of God', can have led to these peculiar discoveries. If they are 'superstitions', they are not, like other superstitions, the degraded offspring of more elaborate mystic or cosmological speculations. The treatment of lunacy, with its 'male' and 'female' ingredients, seems to suggest something of the kind; but there is no clear link between this cure and that other idea, that lunacy is a residue of 'male' sleeping sickness.[1] And in all the other fantastic remedies their intellectual antecedents are simply not traceable, not even to legends or folk-tales. Perhaps the remedies have been adopted, more or less blindly, from other groups and countries, on some of those informative travels of which the barber-doctors boast. As they stand, they are merely crude and absurd attempts at 'empirical' treatment, instances of that 'blundering' I spoke of before.

Any of the medicines just described might equally be the product of the *cigbeciži*, and a number are in fact identical. But unlike the barber-doctors, the *cigbeciži* also employ the fully irrational, non-therapeutic version of *cigbe*, and even their remedies proper, salves, potions, and the like, are much more often based on recipes of an incongruous and abstruse kind.[2] Thus a 'strong' potion taken for intestinal troubles includes the fluid extracted from the gall-bladder of snakes, a potion alleged to cure smallpox contains a boiled lizard tail, and an ointment for rheumatic pains is composed, among other things, of powdered potsherds which must be obtained from old pots found lying about with the broken side up, any other position rendering the remedy worthless.

While these recipes seem as random and arbitrary as the more abstruse examples of the barber-doctors' art, others betray some underlying 'theory', some vague and often uncertain reasoning from analogy or from the principle 'like cures like'. Thus one expert had a cure for impotence consisting of a potion whose ingredients included, besides various roots and two kinds of pepper, also the powdered genitals of a he-goat.[3] A contraceptive credited with lasting effect is concocted from the roots of the

[1] See above, p. 37.

[2] Of the twenty-two *cigbeci* medicines I recorded fifteen belonged to that category, while the corresponding proportion in the case of the barbers' remedies was six in thirty-four.

[3] I have this incongruous evidence for the efficacy of the treatment. My servant, who was with me when I visited the expert, at once bought and drunk the potion to increase his virility. The next day I had to doctor him for severe indigestion.

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are, like the latter, composed of sayings more or less trivial or apposite. A medicine alleged to facilitate childbirth, for example, is called *lamá*, from *lá má 'gi*, 'causing childbirth', and has a meaningless 'greeting'; the antidote for snake-bite *dabwalé* (an undecipherable word) commands the following 'greeting'—'The thing for washing, when a snake bites a person, (this) thing drives the illness away'. The 'contraceptive' made of grass taken from special ant-heaps, is called *botáfī*, a word derived from *botá*, the name for a species of grass and *fī*, 'to drink'; when the grass is removed from the ant-heap one repeats three times: 'One does not know the father of ants; one does not know the mother of ants'; of which crude allusion to the users of this remedy we have already spoken. The 'greeting' of another contraceptive remedy similarly plays upon an analogy—'A person without speech cannot tell', which means, a woman without fertility cannot bear children. The miraculous medicine alleged to make a person invisible and invulnerable has a name and 'greeting' which are highly suggestive; it is called *akpára*, the Nupe word for 'rifle', and is addressed thus—'The night brings darkness. The eye sees in daylight, the eye does not see at night. There is nothing inside the earth save God' (that is, save things God alone can see, as he alone can see a person who has applied this medicine).

Perhaps the term 'invocations' will seem inappropriate in the case of these nondescript addresses or 'greetings'. But let me leave this point for the moment and only mention that invocations proper also have their place in *cigbe* practice. The *cigbeci*, like the barber-doctor, may add some new medicine to those already known; at least, this is true of the head of the order of 'medicine-men'. And whenever he discovers or invents a new remedy, he must perform a sacrifice composed of beer, a fowl, and a small portion of the new *cigbe*, speaking thus—'God, the medicine that has been prepared, here it is. May the medicine be successful. I am sacrificing to Kpara, I am sacrificing to Tswasha Malu, I am sacrificing to Tswako Dzana.' The names mentioned are those of ancestors of the head of the *cigbeci* guild; and the sacrifice is performed over the vessel in which the new medicine will henceforth be kept. As we shall see, both the invocation of ancestors and the treatment of the medicine vessel almost as a sacred shrine are features typical also of the hereditary medicines, which even more conspicuously reveal their irrational or mystical intent.

To turn to the medicines known to individuals. We may mention first that certain simple treatments are familiar to nearly everyone, being applied in the manner of household remedies or as a kind of 'first aid'; only when this fails or seems inadequate does one turn to 'professional' medicines. And even then one often asks friends

and neighbours first before consulting the accredited experts. One does not pay in money for this kind of assistance, but only offers a small return gift of kolanuts or food. The household remedies are mainly laxatives, or cures for toothache, headache, and slight wounds or bruises, though they include also certain crude treatments to induce abortion or prevent pregnancy—by sucking frogs or drinking the blood from the afterbirth. Normally, one uses infusions of common plants, ash-water or natron (both known as laxatives), ointments made of palm-oil or sheanut-butter, or damp earth (applied to cuts and the like); the more complex herbal concoctions and the use of bark and roots, which make up the *cigbe* proper, are entirely absent.

Certain individuals, are known to possess this more 'professional' knowledge as well. Like the barbers, they apply therapeutic treatments in a profane and would-be rational manner, and like the *cigbeci*, practise the non-therapeutic variety with more or less conspicuous mystical intent. Their skill extends to remedies alleged to increase virility and facilitate pregnancy, though contraceptives are outside the scope of the individual practitioner. 'Fantastic' treatments, however, are not. We already mentioned one such cure meant to remove rheumatic pains through 'drawing them from the body'. Two further treatments are of special interest, one because it is empirically sound, the other because it is surgical as well as daring and involves a clear apprehension of the symptoms of a relatively obscure disease. The first example concerns the use of the severely toxic *datura stramonium*. Many Nupe are aware of the effect of the seeds or powdered leaves which produce stupor and insensitiveness, and the experts prescribe small doses, taken in water, as a cure for pains; with less justification, they also recommend the external application of the leaves, soaked in ash-water and mixed with sheanut butter, for aching limbs. The second example is an alleged cure for sleeping sickness, which must be applied in the early stages of the disease, recognized by the swelling of the neck glands. I only met one expert who knew of this treatment, a man from Mokwa, whose repute had spread far and wide. The surgical treatment involves a deep incision in the skin above the glands, charred leaves of a bean variety being rubbed into the wound; the leaves are said to have a caustic effect so that, when the treatment is repeated twice daily for a week, the glands themselves can be removed. As an after-treatment the patient is given an infusion of bark and roots to drink, and a coarse grass and fish to eat. The expert did not claim that his cure was always effective: it would still depend on 'God's will'; but he showed me a man, bearing the scars of the operation, who, he claimed, had completely recovered.

[i.e., simple medicinal treatments. -Analyst]

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consult a pagan (or semi-pagan) *cigbeci*. That the powers of *cigbe* are greater as well as more varied few will doubt; nor do the mallams themselves deny that many of the cures and other effects of *cigbe* are beyond their ken. It was, for example, a Moslem scholar of high repute who put me in touch with the *cigbeciži*, being himself a firm believer in the excellence of their art.

Modern medicine, as practised in hospitals and dispensaries, is a more serious rival. Nupe men and women who for the first time face this novel version of *cigbe* may be suspicious or openly afraid; often they will discontinue the visits to the doctor or dispenser, or leave unused the drugs they are given. A steadily increasing number, however, now have fair confidence in doctors and drugs and would be prepared to admit that our cures are on the whole better than theirs. This is true especially of minor surgical treatments and of injections of all kinds, that is, of treatments utterly unlike the indigenous practices and often 'miraculous' in their effect. This may seem a lukewarm statement; but I do not think that it can be put more positively or optimistically, at least as regards the average Nupe. Administration officials, teachers, and others who have been in close contact with Europeans are exceptions (though only to some extent).[1] Certainly, the Nupe are turning to European medicine much more slowly and waveringly than other African groups I know.

Now these other groups are also more primitive than the Nupe or without a similar, highly organized and would-be rational therapeutic skill. The diverse reaction is thus no accident. Fear and suspicion there would be in either case. But in the more primitive groups organized medicine, as a purely profane skill or knowledge, is entirely novel and unprecedented; it may have to fight religious prejudice, but not its own kind: while in Nupe precisely this is true. Other Africans might feel that European medicine clashes with their religious notions, or identify it with evil magic or witchcraft. The more sophisticated Nupe merely mistrusts the knife which, as everyone knows, 'cannot heal', or cynically suspects the doctors of poisoning patients who fail to recover. At best, he regards the European remedy as one of several possibilities, which he is wont to try out one after the other. And here the odds are not all in favour of the former.

[1] To wit, the following extract from an English composition on *The Hospital*, written in 1936 by a Nupe secondary school boy and corrected by his teacher. 'The disadvantage (of hospitals) is that when a man is taken there to be cured and if the nurses see that they cannot cure him, or perhaps he is given any kind of drugs and he still is exactly opposite as he was brought in, they give him a kind of medicine which makes he will die away.' The teacher found that only the last sentence needed correction, thus—'they give him a poison and he will die'.

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177 755 757 Many cases are already hopeless when they reach the doctors and hospitals, with the result that their remedies will appear to be no better than those of barbers or *cigbeciži*; above all, the European doctor does not profess to cure impotence or sterility, or to procure sterility; so that the most widely sought treatments are also an admitted gap in this new knowledge of 'medicine'.